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ABSTRACT

When universities and colleges approach alumni and other segments of the public for advice, particularly pertaining to academic areas, any branch of the academic administration can tap the expertise of people whose valuable insights might otherwise be unavailable. Such a volunteer advisory board works well at all levels. It can link the academic community to the external community by sharing the insights and expertise achieved through life and work experience. This board exists only to give advice and has no practical power to set policy or pass judgment on personal matters. Members are motivated to serve because it is an honor to be invited and because they can help reform or improve the quality of academic programs so they better meet contemporary needs. The chief officer of the academic unit that an advisory board serves is a good person to direct it. In order to organize a board, it is necessary to get to know the administrators in the alumni office and to strive for a healthy mix of non-alumni and alumni. Members should be appointed to a term with a fixed length (generally 3 years). The board should meet as often as practical since it consists of employed volunteers. Activities should be scheduled that offer intellectual and social stimulation without being overly taxing. Attached are a memo inviting members of the business community to join the Ohio University College of Business Administration Board of Visitors, a sample schedule a 2-day semiannual meeting and a sample certificate. (SM)

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USING ADVISORY BOARDS IN ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

BY GERALD SILVER

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USING ADVISORY BOARDS IN ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

by Gerald Silver

Virtually all universities and colleges now solicit financial support from their alumni through a variety of formalized and structured procedures, but how many similarly approach their alumni and other supporters for advice, particularly advice pertaining to academic areas?

By creating advisory boards of volunteers drawn from the alumni body as well as from other segments of its public, any branch of the academic administration can tap the expertise of people whose valuable insights might otherwise be unavailable at any price.

My positive experiences working with academic advisory boards at both a large state university and a small private college have led me to believe that these boards can work well at the level of the college, school, or even department.

WHAT THE BOARD DOES

In the broadest sense, the board members link the academic community to the external community by sharing the expertise and insights they have achieved through their life and work experience. Students, faculty, and administrators alike all stand to benefit from the existence of a board composed of such people who possess knowledge gained through practical experience

in a given field. The board members can serve as role models and counselors for students who need information about careers. They can help the faculty to identify topics that may be worthy of scholarly research, and they can help the faculty to update and upgrade their professional skills. They can help administrators and faculty to restructure the curriculum so that it continues to meet current needs in the marketplace. They can help bring speakers to campus or to place representatives of the institution before significant audiences off campus.

WHAT THE BOARD DOESN'T DO

It is important to establish at the outset that the board exists to give advice--and solely to give advice. If everyone understands that the board has no practical power to set policy or pass judgment on personnel matters, then the board will be perceived as an asset to the institution. Potential members will understand that by serving on the board they will not be dragged into discussions of delicate issues, and people within your institution who are not on the board won't feel threatened by it. Of course, to the extent that the board delivers sound advice, its power can be considerable--but that power can be exercised only through the dean or department chair whom the advisory board serves.

It also is important to make sure your board is not perceived as being just a clever way to disguise a fund raising activity. It's up to you to make potential members understand

that you hold a sincere interest in their ideas, not their money. This issue--the nature of their involvement with the institution through service on your board--must be approached with a considerable degree of sophistication. On the one hand, you do not want to risk incurring the wrath of your institution's development officers by communicating to any of your board members the idea that their service is in lieu of any financial support from them. On the other, you do not want to alienate any of your board members by suggesting to them that financial support is expected because of their service on the board. As it happens, many of your institution's alumni who are most suited for membership on your academic advisory board also will turn out to be the same alumni who already are staunch supporters of the annual fund and capital projects, or who are prime prospects for such fund raising activities. As it also happens, the positive experiences that alumni and others will enjoy by virtue of service on your board often will have a way of translating themselves into financial support. As an academic officer, you must resist the temptation to use your advisory board as a vehicle for raising money; otherwise, you will just thwart the overall fund raising activities of your institution as you also unwittingly sabotage your own academic programs.

WHY MEMBERS SERVE

What motivates people to volunteer their services as members of an academic advisory board? To begin with, it's an honor to

be asked to serve; by selecting people for service on your board, you are stating publically that they have distinguished themselves in some fashion, and that their thoughts are worthy of widespread attention. Among alumni who feel a sense of gratitude to the institution that stems from their days as students, their service on your board will allow them to express their thanks in a significant way. If they feel a sense of satisfaction from their work in the field they have entered, their service on the board will allow them to help others have a similar experience. If they hope to reform or improve the quality of the academic program so that it better meets contemporary needs, their service will allow them to make suggestions that could lead to meaningful change.

WHO DIRECTS THE BOARD

The chief academic officer of the institution must stand solidly behind the idea of having one or more advisory boards, but the chief officer of the academic unit that an advisory board serves is the ideal person to direct it. No one else within an institution is in a better position to know the precise needs of the unit and the ways in which a board may be of service. Once the nucleus of the board is established, the academic administrator would do well to take a step or two <u>away</u> from the board and allow the volunteers to begin performing the service for which they were recruited: giving advice. You may find it desirable to appoint or elect a president of the board and allow

that person to carry out as many administrative functions as he or she is willing to undertake. The danger that can result from over-direction of the board by the administration is that the discussions that could prove most fruitful may never take place. By giving your board the freedom to follow the lines of thought that seem most promising to them, you may be pleasantly surprised with the results.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A BOARD

If you are a newcomer to your institution it is unlikely that you will bring with you prior knowledge of your new institution's alumni of accomplishment. Making the acquaintance of the administrators in your alumni office is as good a way to start as any; if these people don't have the information you need in their heads, it's undoubtedly in their files. Your senior faculty most likely will prove to be an equally valuable resource for identifying potential board members, as many successful alumni have a habit of keeping in touch with their favorite professors. Trustees and other administrators undoubtedly know many other candidates.

Even if it is possible to assemble your board entirely from the alumni body, I advise against it. Alumni of course have a perspective framed by their experiences as students, but the perspective of former students is not the only one. To achieve the maximum in flexibility and freshness of insight, I recommend striving for a healthy mixture of alumni and non-alumni. People

looking at an institution from the outside often perceive it quite differently from those on the inside; the differing perspectives of non-alumni may serve the valuable purpose of keeping your board's discussions in perspective.

Having identified potential members, you then must make their acquaintance. After you send the candidate a brief letter explaining your intent, follow it up with a visit, in person if at all possible. When you have a solid core of your board in place, it should become easier for you to recruit other members, because you then will be able to enlist their aid when you approach new candidates.

I recommend appointing all members to a term with a fixed length. I have found a term of three years to be reasonable for all parties. It is long enough to allow members to gain a real understanding of the institution and then make meaningful contributions, but it is short enough to permit either side to exit with grace from the relationship, if that becomes necessary, by virtue of the passage of time. If you establish terms of office so that a third of them expire each year, you will guarantee the board of an annual influx of fresh ideas. In the case of members who prove to be especially valuable, you may wish to create the designation of advisor emeritus and invite them to future meetings with voice, but without vote.

Depending on the size and expertise of your board and the breadth of the academic area for which you have responsibility,

you may wish to designate a number of standing or ad hoc committees to address topics of special concern.

WHEN TO MEET, WHAT TO DO

Ideally, your board should meet as often as necessary. However, since you are dealing primarily with volunteers who must give up a day at the office, laboratory, or library in order to serve on the board, your meetings can be held only as often as is practical. A day-long meeting of the full board once per term may be the most feasible arrangement. If you hold the meetings on Fridays, you will make traveling easier for members coming from a distance and you will have the opportunity to continue discussions Saturday morning. So that students and faculty alike may benefit from the board's presence, you must take care to avoid conflict with vacation or examination periods.

To keep your volunteers' interest sharp, you must take pains to schedule activities that offer both intellectual and social stimulation without being overly taxing, physically or mentally. The accompanying sample schedule is modeled after one we followed at Ohio University. We were fortunate (or so many of us thought) to be able to offer an Ohio University football game as the culminating social event for our fall meeting--but participation in a well-planned meeting that leads to positive outcomes for both the institution and the community should be all the incentive you need to offer.

EXHIBIT 1.

OHIO UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
COPELAND HALL
ATHENS, OHIO 45701

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

TELEPHONE 614-594-5446

November 13, 197

The College of Business Administration at Ohio University is concerned with the preparation of students for professional careers in business, and for the continuance of their educational pursuits in graduate studies and professional schools. Its curricula are founded in the liberal arts and its courses stress the conceptual approach to the understanding of business principles and practices.

The College maintains a close relationship with its business community. Guests from leading companies are frequent speakers at student forums and opportunities are provided for cooperative work experiences, as well as for student contact with businessmen and women. All of these essential ancillary activities are integrated with the academic purposes of the College, resulting in a healthy blend of formal training with the practicing world of business.

Senior executives from major organizations are being asked to participate in semi-annual meetings (see attached preliminary program). It means a great deal to the College to have the backing of a devoted group of men and women who subscribe to our seven objectives. We appreciate their efforts and depend upon their help and guidance in providing our business students with such vital education-business experience.

We would like to invite you to join our Board of Visitors for a three-year term, September 1978 - June 1981. I will call you to discuss the Board in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Gerald Silver
Dean

GS/mc
Encl.

EXHIBIT 2

Sample Schedule

Friday

8:30 - 9 a.m.	Coffee, juice, danish
9:00 - 10 a.m.	General session for full board
10:15 - 11:45 a.m.	Committee meetings
Noon - 2 p.m.	Lunch (board and students only)
2:15 - 4 p.m.	Discipline-based meetings
4:00 - 5:30 p.m.	Free time
5:30 - 6:45 p.m.	Reception at president's house for board, guests
7:00 -	Banquet for board and faculty.

Saturday

8:30 - 9:30 a.m.	Breakfast (by committees or disciplines) for board, faculty, students
9:45 - 11:00 a.m.	Committee reports
11:45 - 1:00 p.m.	Buffet luncheon for board, faculty
1:15 -	Social event.

Gerald Silver is dean of the School of Business at Quinnipiac College in Hamden, Conn. Earlier in his career he was dean of the College of Business Administration at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

Quinnipiac College
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
Board of Visitors

Dedicated to assisting the School of Business achieve excellence in education, serve the community, and provide opportunities for interaction among faculty, students, and business practitioners.

Dean, School of Business